

BOTCHKAREVA TELLS OF THE REVOLUTION DEMORALIZING SOLDIERS AT THE FRONT

Russian Woman Fighter Was Prisoner of the Germans for Eight Hours and Wins Medal for the Manner of Her Escape

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THIS STARTS THE STORY

In the summer of 1917 Maria Botchkareva started the world by forming the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit in the Russian army, and right then a Russian peasant girl marched into the International Hall of Fame. In the earlier installments of this story she told of the hardships of her childhood, the brutalities of her married life, and the determination to become a soldier, which was reached by the special permission of the czar. In many battles she wins the respect of her comrades; when she is wounded they are grieved when she returns from the hospital they are jubilant.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

The commander had, in his order of the day, stated the fact of my return and promotion. He furnished me an order to show me the way to the trenches. Again I was hailed by everybody as I emerged from the dugout of the commander of the company, who had placed me in command of a platoon of seventy men. In this capacity I was to keep an inventory of the supplies and equipment of my men, for which purpose I had a soldier perform the duties of a clerk.

Our positions were on the bank of the Styx, which is very narrow and shallow in that section. On the opposite bank the German trenches were several hundred feet from us was a bridge across the stream that had been left intact by both sides. At our end of it we maintained a post where the enemy kept a similar watch at the opposite end. Our line, because of the irregularity of the river's course, was extremely zigzagged. The Germans were very active at mine-throwing. However, the mines traveled so slowly that we could take to cover before they fell on our positions. There were captured a position close to the enemy's front line.

I had not spent a month in the trenches when a local battle occurred which resulted in my capture by the Germans. They had conducted their mine-throwing operations for a period of about twelve days so regularly that we grew accustomed to them, expecting no attack. Besides, it was after the fighting season, and the cold was intense.

One morning about 6 o'clock, when we had turned in for our night's sleep, we were suddenly awakened by a tremendous "Hurrah!" We nervously seized our rifles and peeped through the loopholes. Great heavens! There, within 100 feet of us, in front and in the rear, the Germans were wading the Styx! Before we had time to organize resistance they had captured and were carrying 500 of our men. I was in the batch taken.

We were brought before the German staff for examination. I was questioned with grilling questions, intended to draw out valuable military information. Threats were made to those who refused to talk. Some of the Germans, especially those of non-Russian stock, gave away important facts. As the test was proceeding our artillery officer on the other side opened up a violent bombardment of the German defenses. It was evident that the German commander did not have many reserves, as he made frantic appeals by wire for support. It was decided to send a force to keep us under guard and even a larger force to take us to the rear. As the enemy momentarily expected a Russian attack, he decided not to send us away before help arrived.

"So I am a German prisoner," I thought. "How unexpected! There is still hope that the boys on the other side will come to our rescue. Only every minute is precious. They must hurry or we are lost. Here, my turn is coming. What will I tell them? I must deny being a soldier and invent some kind of a story."

"I am a woman and not a soldier," I announced as soon as I was asked. "Are you of noble blood?" I was asked.

"Yes," I answered, simultaneously deciding to claim that I was a Red Cross nurse, dressed in uniform. In order to pay a visit to my husband, an officer in the front line trenches.

"Have you many women fighting in the ranks?" was the next question.

"I don't know. I told you that I was not a soldier."

"What were you doing in the trenches, then?"

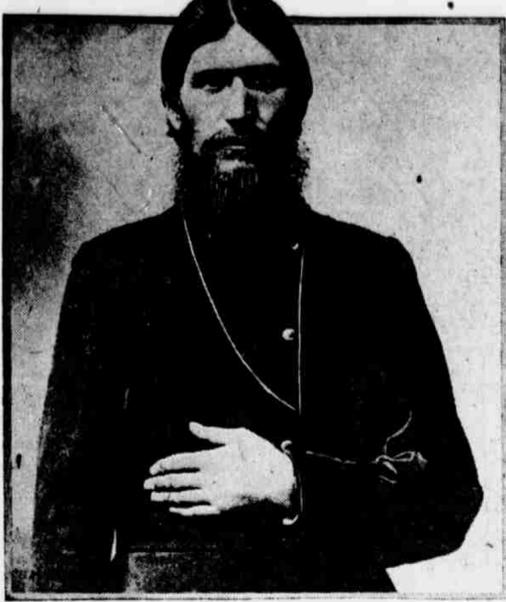
"I came to see my husband, who is an officer of the regiment."

"Why did you shoot, then? The soldiers tell that you shot at them."

"I did it to defend myself. I was afraid to be captured. I serve as a Red Cross nurse in the rear hospital, and came over to the fighting line for a visit."

The Russian fire was growing hotter every minute. Some of our shells wounded non-combatant soldiers, but several of the captives. Noon had arrived, but the Germans were too nervous to eat their lunch. The expected reserves were not forthcoming, and there was every prospect of a fierce counter-attack by our troops.

At 2 o'clock our soldiers went over



Yashka, the monk whose death precipitated the Russian revolution.

the top and started for the German positions. The enemy commander decided to retreat, and his men fled to the second line rather than defend the front trenches. It was a critical moment. As we were lined up the "Hurrah!" of our comrades reached us. It stimulated us to a spontaneous decision.

We threw ourselves, 500 strong, at our captors, wrestled many of their rifles and bayonets and engaged in a ferocious hand-to-hand combat, just as our men rushed through the torn wire entanglements into the trenches. The confusion was indescribable; the killing merciless. I grasped five hand grenades that lay near me and threw them at a group of about ten Germans. They must have all been killed. Our entire line across the river was advancing at the same time. The first German line was occupied by our troops and both banks of the Styx were then in our hands.

Thus ended my captivity. I was in German hands for a period of only eight hours and amply avenged even this brief stay. There was great activity among us for a couple of days. We fortified the newly won positions and prepared for another attack at the foe. Two days later we received the signal to advance. But again our artillery had failed to cut the German wire defenses. After pushing on against the withering fire and capturing heavy losses, we were compelled to retreat, leaving many of our comrades wounded and dying on the field of battle.

Our commander improvised a relief party by ordering his men to volunteer. He responded among the first. Provided with twenty red crosses, which were prominently displayed, and leaving our rifles in the trenches, we went towards among us, especially those of non-Russian stock, gave away important facts. As the test was proceeding our artillery officer on the other side opened up a violent bombardment of the German defenses. It was evident that the German commander did not have many reserves, as he made frantic appeals by wire for support. It was decided to send a force to keep us under guard and even a larger force to take us to the rear. As the enemy momentarily expected a Russian attack, he decided not to send us away before help arrived.

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Sets Example to Recalcitrant Soldiers by Seizing Her Rifle and Going Over the Top to a Listening Post

The general shook my hand warmly, remarking that he had heard many praiseworthy things of me. Our positions were now on a hill, in the vicinity of Zelenaya Kolonia, while the enemy was at our feet in the valley. The trenches we occupied had been in German hands some time before.

It was late in January when I made an expedition into No Man's Land at the head of a patrol of fifteen men. We crawled along a ditch that was formerly a German communication trench. It ran along a very exposed part of the field and the utmost caution was exercised by us. As we came nearer to the enemy's trench line I thought I heard German conversation. Leaving ten men behind, with instructions to rush to our aid in case of a fight, five of us crept forward at a snail's pace and with perfect noiselessness. The German voices grew clearer and clearer.

Finally we beheld a German listening post. There were four of them, all seated with their backs toward us. Their rifles were scattered on the ground while they warmed their hands over a fire. Two of my men stretched their hands out, reached the rifles and removed them. It was a painstaking operation, as slow as eternity. The Germans chattered on unconcernedly. As I was cautiously going after the third rifle two of the Germans, having apparently heard a noise, were about to turn.

In an instant my men were upon them. The two were bayoneted before I had an opportunity to realize what was on. It was my intention to bring the "Hurrah!" of our comrades, but the two were safe in our hands. One of the prisoners was a tall, red-headed fellow, the other was evidently an educated person, with pinpoints

attitude from above. In a sense, they were generated from below by a dumb and yet potent undercurrent of restlessness.

We were reviewed before returning to the front line by General Yaluyev, the commander of the Fifth Corps. I was presented to him by our com-

We took them to regimental headquarters, accompanied on the way by numerous evocations and congratulations. The commander inquired as to the details of the capture and had them recorded verbatim. He congratulated me, pressing my hand, and so did all the other officers, telling me that my name would live forever in the annals of the Polish Regiment. I was recommended for a gold cross of the first degree and given two days' leave for recuperation from my fatigue.

At the end of the two days my company joined me in the reserve. Strange things were occurring in our midst. In subdued voices the men repeated dark rumors about Rasputin's death. Wild stories about his connections with the court and Germany were communicated from mouth to mouth. The spirit of insubordination was growing in the soldiers' midst. It was still suppressed at that time. The men were very friendly, but they were saying "How long shall we continue this fighting?" and "What are we fighting for?" were on the lips of everybody. It was the fourth winter and still there was no end in sight.

Our boys were genuinely anxious to solve the great puzzle that the war had become to them. Hadn't it been proven again and again that the officers at headquarters were selling them to the enemy? Hadn't a multitude of reports reached them that the court was pro-German? Hadn't they heard of the War Minister placed under arrest and charged with being a traitor? Wasn't it clear, therefore, that the government in official class, was with the enemy? Then why continue indefinitely this carnage? If the government was in alliance with Germany, what prevented it from concluding peace? Was it the desire to have millions more of them slaughtered?

We returned to our positions and took up the heavy burden. It was not long before an attack was organized against the German line. Our artillery again displayed little effectiveness and again we climbed out of the trenches and swept across No Man's Land while the enemy's wire defenses were intact. It was not the first of Russian breaches that had beaten itself in vain against that parapet of death to be hurled back with grave losses without even coming to grips with the foe. But each of those waves had left its quantity of bitterness in the hearts of the survivors. And it was particularly leaving these of bitterness that this last futile attack had left in the souls of the soldiers of our sector.

Nevertheless, in February, 1917, the

front was unprepared for the eruption that was to shake the world soon. That front maintained its fierce hatred for the Germans and could conceive of no righteous peace otherwise than through the efficient organization of a gigantic offensive against the enemy. In the way of such an offensive was the treasonable government. Against this government were directed the indignation and suppressed dissatisfaction of the rank and file. But so old, so stable, so deep-rooted was the institution of Tsarism that, with all their secret contempt for the court, with all the hidden hatred for the officials of the government, the armies at the front were not ripe yet for a conscious and deliberate rising.

THE REVOLUTION AT THE FRONT

The first realization to warn us of the approaching storm was a soldier from our company who had returned from a leave of absence at Petrograd. "Oh, my! If you but knew, boys, what is going on in the rear! Revolution! Everywhere they talk of overthrowing the Tsar. The capital is aflame with revolution."

These words spread like wildfire among the men. They gathered in groups and discussed the possibilities of the report. "Would it mean peace? Would they get land and freedom? Or would it mean another huge offensive before the end of the war?" The arguments of course, took place in whispers, behind the backs of the officers. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that revolution meant preparation for a general attack against the Germans to win a victory before the conclusion of peace. For several days the air was charged with electricity. Everybody felt that earth-shaking events were being planned, and our hearts echoed the distant ramblings of the raging tempest. There was something reticent about the talk, but the eyes of the officers, as if they kept important news to themselves. Finally the joyous news arrived. The commander gathered the entire regiment to read to us the glorious words of the first manifesto, together with the famous Order No. 1. The miracle had happened. Tsarism, which enslaved us and thrived on the blood and marrow of the toiler, had fallen. Freedom, equality and brotherhood! How sweet were these words to our ears. We were transported. There were tears of joy, embraces, dancing. The commander read to us the manifesto, which concluded with a fervent appeal to us to hold the line with

greater vigilance than ever, now that we were free citizens, to defend our newly won liberty from the attacks of the Kaiser and his slaves. Would we defend our freedom? A multitude of throats shouted in a chorus, that passed over No Man's Land and reverberated in the German trenches. "Yes, we will!"

Would we swear allegiance to the provisional government, which wanted us to prepare to drive the Germans out of Free Russia before we returned home to divide the land?

"We swear!" thundered thousands of men, raising their right hands, and thoroughly alarming the enemy. Then came Order No. 1, signed by the Petrograd Soviet of Workmen and Soldiers. Soldiers and officers were now equal. It declared: All the citizens of the Free Russia were equal before the law. There would be no more discipline. The hated officers were enemies of the people and should no longer be obeyed and kept at their posts. The common soldier would now rule the army. Let the rank and file elect their best men and institute committees; let there be company, regimental, corps and army committees.

We were dazzled by this shower of brilliant phrases. The men went about as if intoxicated. For four days the festival continued unabated, so wild with the spirit of jubilation were the boys. The Germans could not at first understand the cause of the celebration. When they learned it they ceased firing.

There were meetings, meetings and meetings. Day and night the regiment seemed to be in continuous session, listening to speeches that dwelt almost exclusively on the words of peace and freedom. The men were hungry for beautiful phrases and gloated over them.

All duty was abandoned in the first few days. While the great upheaval had affected me profoundly, on the first day or two I shared completely the ecstasy of the men. I awoke early to a sense of responsibility. I gathered from the manifestos and speeches that what was demanded of us was to hold the line with much more energy than before. Wasn't this the concrete significance for us of the revolution? To my questions the soldiers replied affirmatively, but had such disappeared with the revolution. Even Colonel Stubendorf, the commander of the regiment, was gone, retiring perhaps because of his German name. Our new commander was Kudriavtsev, a popular officer. (CONTINUED TOMORROW)

up duty at the listening post. He refused. "I will take no orders from a babe," he snorted. "I can do as I please. We have freedom now."

I was painfully stunned. Why, this very same soldier would have gone through fire for me a week before. And now he was sneering at me. It seemed so incredible. It was overwhelming. "Hah, hah," he called. "You can go yourself."

Flushed with chagrin, I seized a rifle and answered: "Can I? Will you show a free citizen ought to guard his freedom?" And I climbed over the top and made my way to the listening post, where I remained on duty for the full two hours.

I talked to the soldiers, appealing to their sense of honor and arguing that the revolution imposed greater responsibility upon the man in the ranks. They agreed that the defense of the country was the most important task confronting us. But didn't the revolution bring them also freedom, with the injunction to create their own control of the army and the abolition of discipline? The men were in a high state of enthusiasm, but obedience was contrary to their ideas of liberty. Seeing that I could not get my men to perform their duties, I went to the commander of the company and asked to be released from the army and sent home. "I see no good in sticking here and doing nothing," I said. "If this is war, then I want to be out of it. I can't get my men to do anything."

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